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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda
Implementation of article 21 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Reports provided by specialized agencies of the United Nations on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

1. On behalf of the Committee, the Secretariat invited the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), on 5 May 1998, to submit to the Committee by 20 May 1998 a report on information provided by States to FAO on the implementation of article 14 and related articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which would supplement the information contained in the reports of those States parties to the Convention that will be considered at the nineteenth session. Annexed to the present note are country briefs prepared by FAO on Slovakia and South Africa.

2. Other information sought by the Committee refers to activities, programmes and policy decisions undertaken by FAO to promote the implementation of article 14 and related articles of the Convention.

3. The report annexed hereto has been submitted in compliance with the Committee's requests.

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Annex

Country briefs prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations for the nineteenth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Slovakia

Slovakia was born in 1993, and, like most young democracies, it is politically unstable and unemployment is a problem, especially in rural areas. Slovakia is, however, a predominantly industrial rather than agricultural society.

Women in agriculture

There are 2.3 million people (44 per cent of the population) living in rural areas, of whom 1,174,000 are women.[1] Unemployment in rural areas has increased, causing serious problems in certain areas because heavy industry has decreased and agricultural production is in a transition phase. The number of agricultural workers in 1994 was estimated at 264,000, of whom 80,000 were women. Full-time work is common for women when they are employed. The wage level of women in agriculture is lower than that of men, but higher than that of urban women. The proportion of women in the labour force has always been high in Slovakia (46 per cent in 1991).[1] However, beyond their responsibilities outside the home, women also have household and reproductive duties.

The role of women in agriculture is constantly changing in many of the project countries owing to the process of privatization and the restoration of property rights. As a result, there are increasing numbers of private farms, while at the same time the number of the agricultural labourers is decreasing. Migration of young, educated women is a common trend, and migration from cities to rural areas (12,000 in 1991) is more common than from villages to cities (11,000 in 1991).[1]

Efforts to promote the advancement of women

There are only a few development programmes for rural women. There are FAO projects on management, and in 1993 the FAO Regional Office for Europe, in collaboration with the Women in Development Service of the Sustainable Development Department of FAO, commissioned a study on the position of rural women in selected Central and Eastern European countries in an attempt to analyse the socio-economic situation and the status of rural women. The aim of the analysis is to draw a general picture of the situation of rural women in Central and Eastern European countries, to identify any particular problems and to describe the priorities for rural women in these countries for possible development into a national plan of action in the future.

Women in education

The educational level of rural women is lower than that of rural men. As well as an agricultural university, Slovakia has many agricultural schools and secondary-level schools of agriculture. Adult education for rural people is organized by the agricultural university and the forestry university of the country. Adult training for rural women is needed in home economics, nutrition, farm management and small business entrepreneurship. The main educational needs of rural women are not perceived to be in agricultural production, but in entrepreneurship and home economics at the school, institute and university levels and in adult education and training.

Access to productive resources

Extension services. There are agricultural extension services in legislation, finance, taxation, trade, marketing and management of enterprises, but none in home economics or home management. As a result of great social and political changes in the Central and Eastern European countries, the national extension service organizations are changing and continuously developing their services.

Women's membership in rural organizations

There are many active farmers' interest groups, and occasionally women hold important positions on village and municipal boards. One of the main organizations for rural people, especially for farmers, is the Farmers' Union. Although women's membership is possible, there are very few activities directed towards women. Further, there is also the Association of Landowners and the Association of Farmers, which has women members.

Women in decision-making positions

The role of women in public life is weak. Rural women may be elected to the village board or local government, but the proportion of women in Parliament is very low.

Women's legal status

The equal status of women and men is assured by law. Slovakia has legislation on the equal status of women in the following areas: succession and inheritance, social security protection, the right to credit, taxation, labour legislation, entrepreneurship, land reforms, subsidies, voting rights, access to education, equal opportunities in work and equal pay for equal work. In practice however, women and men are not equal. Indeed, women are discriminated against in the labour market. There is inequality in attitudes, in the privatization process, in public life, in incomes and in leadership (both in the public and the private spheres).

Recommendations

- The main educational needs of rural women are not perceived to be in agricultural production, but in entrepreneurship and home economics at the school, institute and university levels and in adult education and training.
- The main problems of rural women are unemployment or the double workload that results from the traditional division of labour inside the family, the lack of extension services, the lack of knowledge about home economics and nutrition and the shortage of voluntary women's associations.
- The most urgent need of rural women is improvement in the general level of education and knowledge in home economics.

South Africa

Status of women

Women comprise more than half of the total population. However, they remain largely marginalized, uninformed and under-represented in development activities.

The political changes of recent years have not brought many tangible benefits for women of the region, at least not to the same extent as for men.

Women in the labour market

Women have not enjoyed the fruits of economic growth to the same degree as their male counterparts. Women still lag behind men in education and employment and are almost absent in decision-making activities. Indeed, 35.2 per cent of the economically active women are unemployed, compared to 25.7 per cent of men, and the gap is wider in a strictly urban industrial employment setting.[2] Women's participation in the formal employment sector is particularly constrained. Women's fair and equal representation is constrained by an unbearable workload and lower incomes. While the concept of equal pay for equal work is agreed to in theory and legislation guarantees it, the reality is that women remain scarce at the higher levels of management and are concentrated in the lower paying jobs. Thus, generally, women's earnings are lower than those of men. Research shows that women in South Africa represent 90 per cent of the informal sector entrepreneurs.

Women in agriculture

In 1994, 77.8 per cent of the economically active population in agriculture, forestry and fishing were men and only 22.2 per cent were women.[2]

Access to agricultural resources

Land. There is a great disparity between women and men in the size of landholdings. Women have limited access to land, and when they are landholders, in general, they have much smaller farms and are faced with decreasing quality of plots, thus they have an exceptionally difficult task in maintaining levels of output and household food security.

Credit. Women's access to formal financing is limited, as financial institutions require a collateral against loans, and women generally do not own land.

Recommendations

- There is a need to research different economic activities for women in the informal sector in order to improve their economic status.
- Clear policies and strategies should be formulated on the promotion of women's advancement in agriculture.
- Increased research should be conducted on gender issues in agriculture: women's contribution to the national economy; the gender division of labour in productive and reproductive tasks; technology to improve women's productivity and incomes.
- Gender-sensitization programmes for policy makers should be developed.
- Inequality in land rights should be redressed to ensure equal access to land titles for both women and men, in particular for female-headed households.
- Efforts should be made to increase women's access to appropriate technology to reduce their workloads.

Notes

[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Overview of the socio-economic position of rural women in selected Central and Eastern European countries" (Rome, 1996).

[2] SADC (1997), "Into the future: gender and SADC", Harare: SADC.